DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 980 SO 015 741

AUTHOR Mayton, Daniel M., II
TITLE Spontaneous Concern about Nuclear War by College Students.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Las Vegas, NV, April 25-28, 1984). Appendix may be marginally legible due to light type. For a related paper, see SO 015 740.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; Educational Research; *Fear; Females; Higher Education; Males; *Nuclear Warfare; Religious Factors; Research Needs; Rural Areas; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics

ABSTRACT

The results of this study show that college students from small towns in the Rocky Mountain states are very concerned about nuclear war. One hundred eighty-six undergraduates from a small college in the Pacific Northwest were asked to respond to five presentations each of two incomplete sentences: "I worry about...," and "My greatest fear regarding the future is..." One-half of the students mentioned nuclear war at least once. In an earlier study of a similar nature only 18.1 percent of undergraduates mentioned nuclear war as a concern. However, in the earlier study, the students were given only two chances to respond to the same open-ended questions. Since a substantial number of college students did not mention a concern about nuclear war when given only two opportunities to do so, but subsequently did so in the present study when given ten opportunities, it would appear that concern about nuclear war exists, but that it is not one of the students' top worries or concerns about the future. In the present study males expressed more concern about nuclear war than females; persons describing themselves as extremely religious also expressed more concern. (RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED245980

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Daniel M. Mayton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Spontaneous Concern About Nuclear War by College Students

Daniel M. Mayton II

Lewis-Clark State College

Paper presented at the meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Las Vegas, Nevada, April 27, 1984

Running Head: Spontaneous Concern

SO 015 741

ABSTRACT

The issue of nuclear war and its prevention through either a strong military and deterrence or a nuclear weapons freeze and arms reduction has been discussed extensively in the media during the last year. The parallel resurgence of this topic in the psychological literature marks a swing away from the period of the late 1960's and early 1970's when research concerning the psychological impact of the possibility of nuclear war was sparce. The purpose of the present study is to add to this professional literature by studying the concerns of persons from nonurban areas. Undergraduates at a small college in the Pacific Northwest volunteered to complete two questionnaires during their regular class time in an introduction to psychology class. Only 13 percent of the subjects grew up in towns with populations larger than 40,000, 40.8 percent grew up in towns with populations between 10,000 and 40,000 in population, and 46.3 percent grew up in towns with populations smaller than 10,000. In response to five presentations each of "I worry about..." and "My greatest fear regarding the future...", one-half of all the subjects mentioned nuclear war, nuclear bombs, or some related term at least once. Demographic data concerning age, marital status, SES, political affiliation, and religious background were used in a stepwise regression analysis to predict spontaneous concern about nuclear war. Sex and how religious a person described themselves to be were the only significant predictors. Because of a low R value, the results of the regression analysis should be interpreted tentatively.

Spontaneous Concern About Nuclear War by College Students

During the final days of our last global conflict, nuclear weapons were detonated killing thousands of Japanese civilians and military personnel in a matter of seconds. The impact of this aggressive act and its devastation have been widely discussed among nuclear scientists (Teller and Brown, 1975), policy makers, and others (Hersey, 1946; Lifton, 1967; Kahn, 1961). The relevance and gravity of nuclear war and its portent to humankind are undeniable. The presence of weapons with over a thousand times the destructive power of their predecessors and a wide range of effective and accurate delivery systems to place them at their targets fuels the current debate concerning nuclear weapons development, deployment, and strategy. Concern with the United States' and the Soviet Union's overreliance on the policy of deterrence--to the relative subordination of arms control negotiations, arms reduction negotiations, and the building of conflict resolution vehicles through increased communication--has led to policy challenges from numerous advocacy groups throughout the world. The Reagan administration's rhetoric and policy reestablishing U.S. military dominance in the world have triggered an acceleration in the arms race which makes any failure in our strategy of deterrence potentially more cataclysmic with each day that passes.

Despite the extended debate regarding nuclear war issues in the political arena, a coherent and comprehensive description of the attitudes of children, adolescents, and adults toward nuclear war has not

emerged from the professional literature. Social scientists have barely begun to research the attitudes toward nuclear war and the impact of the possibility of nuclear war. One of the more prominent writers on this topic, Robert J. Lifton, has described this situation as an "intellectual and moral scandal" (1982, p. 15). Based on his observations regarding the lack of study of the psychological and social effects of the Hiroshima experience on survivors, Lifton states his rule of thumb regarding professional research topic selection as follows: "The more important a subject is, the less likely it is to be studied in our academies or elsewhere" (p. 18). Considering the seriousness of the threat of nuclear war as an ultimate aggressive act, the limited number of studies on this topic seems to be explained quite well by Lifton.

The U.S. Congress' failure to ratify the SALT II treaty sparked a much needed resurgence in research on the psychological and social effects of nuclear war issues. When this recent research is combined with earlier research, primarily from the early 1960's, a tentative picture of attitudes may be sketched. Studies have assessed the attitudes of children (Darr, 1963; Escalona, 1965; Croake, 1969); adolescents (Bachman and Hass in Beardslee and Mack, 1983); college students (Novak and Lerner, 1966; Mayton and Delamater, 1983); and the general adult population (Jeffries, 1974; Fiske, Pratto, and Pavelchek, 1983). Additional studies have assessed attitudes of two of the above groups (i.e., Adams, 1963; Schwebel, 1982; Beardslee and Mack, 1982). Developmental trends can only be cautiously discussed from these

cross-sectional studies grouped across different samples and across different decades. Given that the studies have been conducted primarily in large urban areas and, to a lesser degree, suburban areas concentrated in the eastern and western coastal states, results indicate that a sizeable percentage of all age groups are concerned about nuclear war and its possibility. While careful to point out the limitations in generalizing from the limited research completed at this time, Dodds (1983) describes the trend "that as children grow through junior high school, high school, and college, they are less fearful of nuclear destruction or, at least, are less likely to admit to such fears on research questionnaires" (p. 4).

The present investigation is designed to focus on the concerns of college students. Unlike many other research topics in psychology, the use of college students has been minimal. A second purpose of this investigation is to focus on the concerns of persons from nonurban areas thereby studying a group of individuals conspicuously missing from earlier research efforts.

Elder (1965) in a review of the reactions of children to the threat of nuclear war questioned the use of direct attitude assessment devices as the best method to determine concern. He advocates indirect or disguised approaches as the best methodologies of revealing the emotional responses to this issue. Research reported by Elder (1965) does not clearly indicate strong emotional responses to the threat of nuclear war by children, adolescents or college students. A study by Mayton and Delamater (1983) used the indirect method of incomplete sentences to

determine spontaneous expression of concern about nuclear war by college students. In response to "My greatest fear regarding the future is..." or "I worry about...", a total of 18.1% of their sample mentioned nuclear war, nuclear destruction or some related term. While this percentage is significantly higher than the number of undergraduates that mentioned nuclear war in response to these indirect cues during the 1960's, it is still lower than discussions of this topic in the media and the professional literature would imply. The present investigation is a descriptive study which utilizes this indirect approach to the measurement of spontaneous concern about nuclear war. This study will modify the indirect measurement process so that more opportunity exists to express concern.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were undergraduate students from a small state-supported college in the Pacific Northwest. Each subject volunteered to complete the questionnaire as part of a larger research project during their regular class time in two sections of the introduction to psychology course. There was over a 96 percent compliance rate with a total of 186 respondents. The age of subjects varied from 17 to 49 with a mean age of 21.4 and a standard deviation of 5.43. Females made up 59.5% of the subjects and 40.5% were males. A total of 71.9% of the subjects grew up in towns in the Rocky Mountain states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming

or Colorado. Subjects from the Pacific states of Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska and Hawaii made up 21.9% of the respondents. Only 13% of the subjects grew up in towns with populations larger than 40,000, 40.8 percent grew up in towns with populations between 10,000 and 40,000 in population, and 46.3 percent grew up in towns with populations smaller than 10,000.

Procedure

Subjects were asked to complete several questionnaires as part of a larger study to determine the relationships between their attitudes toward certain world affairs and selected personal characteristics. The first questionnaire administered is presented in Appendix A and is the only one of concern to this paper.

The demographic characteristics of sex, marital status, age, socio-economic status (as determined by father's and mother's education level and household income as a child), geographic region of hometown, size of hometown, political affiliation, military history, religious affiliation, religiosity, church attendance and the number of memberships in organizations and community groups were determined. The final section of the questionnaire used an incomplete sentences format to determine spontaneous concerns about nuclear war. Subjects responded to five presentations each of "I worry about..." and "One of my fears regarding the future is...". Thus ten opportunities were provided for respondents to spontaneously mention nuclear war as a concern instead of the two chances in the earlier study by Mayton and Delamater (1983).

RESULTS

The responses to the ten incomplete sentences were analyzed to determine spontaneous concern about nuclear war. If respondents mentioned nuclear war, nuclear destruction, atomic bombs or some related term, they were classified as having expressed spontaneous concern. If no mention was made of nuclear war terminology on any of the incomplete sentences, then they were classified as failing to express spontaneous concern about nuclear war. One half or 93 of the 186 respondents expressed spontaneous concern.

The demographic characteristics of sex, age, marital status, three indices of socioeconomic status, hometown size and location, political party affiliation, military background, religious affiliation, how religious a person the respondents reported themselves to be and the number of memberships in civic and community organizations were used as predictor variables in a stepwise multiple regression analysis. The criteria to be predicted was expression of spontaneous concern. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences - X (Norusis, 1983) was utilized for this analysis.

Only two variables entered the multiple regression equation with significant regression weights ($p \leq .05$). Sex, coded as 1 for males and 2 for females was the first variable to enter the equation. Self-reported religiosity on a five point scale with 5 being "extremely religious" and 1 being "not at all religious" was the other significant valuable in predicting spontaneous concern. The complete equation

predicting spontaneous concern (2 coded as expressed and 1 coded when respondents failed to express concern) is as follows:

Spontaneous Concern = 1.575 + (-.196) Sex + (.087) Religiosity

While both weights are significant and the overall F = 4.86 and is significant at the .0091 level, the multiple R for predicting spontaneous concern with this equation is only .258. Thus these two variables only account for 6.7% of the variability in the spontaneous concern variable.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reflect a pervasive concern about nuclear war as spontaneously expressed by college students from nonurban towns in the Rocky Mountain states. While one should be cautious in interpreting separate sample results obtained at different times, a comparison of the results of this study and the study by Mayton and Delamater (1983) is instructive considering the methodological similarities with the present study. Only 18.1% of the respondents in the earlier study spontaneously expressed concern but 50% did in the present study when given eight additional opportunities to do so. Either there was a real increase in concern or the concern about nuclear war exists but it is not as often one of the college student's top two worries or concerns about the future. Since a substantial number of college students did

not mention a concern about nuclear war in their first two opportunities but subsequently did so in the present study, the latter explanation appears to be more plausible.

The results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis are disappointing in terms of using selected demographic variables to predict spontaneous concern. The low multiple R warrants extreme caution in extrapolating from the findings. Sex entered the regression equation as males expressed more spontaneous concern about nuclear war than females. Persons describing themselves as extremely religious also expressed more spontaneous concern regarding this issue. Nearly 94% of the variance of spontaneous concern about nuclear war is not explained by these two variables. Thus it appears that college students spontaneous concern cannot be adequately explained by the selected variables. In other words, expressions of concern occur at the same proportions regardless of age, marital status, levels of socioeconomic status, hometown characteristics, political party affiliation and church affiliation and attendance. As such, spontaneous concern among college students appears to be a broad concern and not a manifestation of the presence of a particular group with clearly identifiable demographic attributes.

More research is needed to assess the spontaneous concern about nuclear war with college students and adults from all parts of the country. This study documented a concern about nuclear war for a little studied subject pool in terms of nonurban college students from the Rocky Mountain states. Validation of these findings is essential if a

better picture of attitudes towards nuclear war is to emerge from the research literature. Exploratory research to determine some of the factors which account for the unexplained variance of the expression of spontaneous concern is also needed. Personality characteristics being likely candidates as predictors in future research.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. F. Adolescent opinion on national problems. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1963, 42 (4), 397-400.

Beardslee, W. and Mack, J. The impact on children and adolescents of nuclear developments. In American Psychiatric Association, Task Force Report #20, Psychosocial Aspects of Nuclear Developments. Washington, D.C.: 1982, pp. 64-93.

Beardslee, W.R. and Mack, J.E. Adolescents and the threat of nuclear war: The evolution of a perspective. The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine, 1983, 56, 79-91.

Croake, J.W. Fears of children. Human Development, 1969, 12, 239-247.

Darr, J.W. The impact of the nuclear threat on children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1963, 33 (2), 203-204.

Dodds, J.B. The effects on children of growing up under the threat of nuclear holocaust. Unpublished paper, University of Denver (Denver, Colorado), 1983.

Elder, J.H. A summary of research on reactions of children to nuclear war. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1965, 35(1),120-123.

Escalona, S. Children and the threat of nuclear war. In Schwebel, M. (Ed.) Behavior Science and Human Survival. Palo Alto, CA: Behavioral Science Press, 1965.

Fisk, S.T.; Prato, F.; and Pavelchek, M.A. Citizens images of nuclear war: Contents and consequenses. Journal of Social Issues, 1983, 39 (1), 41-65.

Hersey, J.R. Hiroshima. New York: A. Knopf, 1946.

Jeffries, V. Political generations and the acceptance or rejection of nuclear warfare. Journal of Social Issues, 1974, 30 (3), 119-136.

Kahn, H. On thermonuclear war. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Lifton, R.J. Death in life: Survivors of Hiroshima. New York: Random House, 1967.

Lifton, R.J. Nuclearism. Journal of Clinical Child Psychology. Summer 1980, 119-124.

Lifton, R.J. Beyond nuclear numbing. Teacher's College Record, 1982, 84 (1), 15-29.

Mayton, D. and Delamater, M. Nuclear war: Fears and concerns of college students. Paper presented at Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, Snowbird, Utah, 1983.

Norusis, M.J. SPSS-X-Introductory Statistics Guide. New York: McGraw Hill, 1983.

Novak, D.W. and Lerner, M.J. The effect of preparatory action or beliefs concerning nuclear war: A test of some alternative explanations. The Journal of Social Psychology, 1965, 70, 111-121.

Schwebel, M. Effects of the nuclear war threat on children and teenagers: Implications for professionals. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1982, 52, 608-618.

Schwebel, M. and Schwebel, B. Children's reactions to the threat of nuclear plant accidents. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 51 (2), April 1981, 260-270.

Teller, E. and Brown, A. The legacy of Hiroshima. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975.

APPENDIX A

Date: _____

Circle One: Male Female Age: _____

Check the highest level of education that you have completed:

____ Grade School
____ Junior High School
____ High School
____ College (Specify number of years if you did not graduate ____)
____ College graduate (major(s) _____ GPA _____)
____ Graduate school (Degree(s) earned _____)

Marital Status: ___Married; ___Separated; ___Widowed; ___Divorced; ___Single

Father's Occupation: _____
Indicate the highest level of education that your father completed: _____

Mother's Occupation: _____
Indicate the highest level of education that your mother completed: _____

Consider your hometown to be the place you lived during your most formative years as a child and adolescent.

Name of Hometown _____

State _____

Country _____

Size of hometown: Circle one.

under 500 501-1000 1001-5000 5001-10,000 10,001-40,000 40,000-100,000 100,001 or mo

Your household's annual income while you we're growing up. Circle one.

less than 10,000 10,001-20,000 20,001-35,000 35,001-50,000 more than 50,000

Your occupation: _____
(Indicate student only if you are presently a full-time student)

Political affiliation: Circle one.

Republican Democrat Other (please specify _____)

Did you serve in the military? Yes No
If yes, indicate: Branch of Service: _____
Rank at Discharge: _____
Length of Service: _____ years
Date of Discharge: Month _____ Year _____
Honors/Medals: _____

Circle your religious affiliation:

Catholic Protestant Mormon Jewish Moslem Other (specify _____)

Are you a religious person? Circle one.

Extremely Religious 5 4 3 2 1 Not at All Religious

Do you presently attend church? Circle one.

Every Week | About Once a Month | Several Times a Year | Rarely Attend | Never Have Attended

Please list the organizations and community groups which you are a member. (i.e. Elks, Moose, Lions, Kiwanis, VFW, American Legion, DAR, etc.)

Please list all honors, awards, scholarships, etc. which you have received.

Complete each of the following sentences in a way that expresses your real feelings. Please respond differently to each.

1. I worry about

2. I worry about

3. I worry about

4. I worry about

5. I worry about

Complete each of the following sentences in a way that expresses your real feelings. Please respond differently to each

1. One of my fears regarding the future is

2. One of my fears regarding the future is

3. One of my fears regarding the future is

4. One of my fears regarding the future is

5. One of my fears regarding the future is

BEST COPY AVAILABLE